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Webster Sworn In as C.I.A. Director

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WASHINGTON, May 26 — William H. Webster was sworn in today as Director of Central Intelligence and pledged that America's intelligence agents would "carry out their assignments throughout the world with fidelity to the Constitution and to the laws of our beloved country."

His vow echoed the comments of President Reagan, who told the audience at Mr. Webster's swearing-in ceremony that political leaders had a responsibility to assure Americans that their intelligence service "is staffed by honorable men and women who work within the framework of our laws and shared values."

They spoke in an outdoor ceremony at the headquarters of the Central Intelligence Agency in Langley, Va.

'Agency Has Been Damaged'

The two speeches highlighted a problem facing Mr. Webster as he assumes control of the C.I.A.: a widespread sentiment on Capitol Hill that the agency has not been working within the law and needs to be more tightly controlled.

President Reagan, who is required by law to inform Congress about covert operations in a "timely fashion," waited 10 months before telling anybody about the clandestine sale of arms to Iran. As a result, Congress is considering legislation to place the President and the agency under stricter limits.

"It's pretty clear," said Representa-

He promises that agents will obey the law.

tive Matthew F. McHugh, Democrat of Upstate New York, who serves on the House Select Committee on Intelligence, "that the agency has been damaged in the eyes of many members of Congress, including many members of the intelligence committee, because of its involvement in the Iran arms sales and the contra issue."

Mr. Webster, 63 years old, succeeds William J. Casey, who was often at odds with Congress. Mr. Casey stepped down from his post in February and died of a brain tumor this month.

"As an Administration supporter, I feel we have not been blessed with total candor from the agency," said Representative Henry J. Hyde, Republican of Illinois, who is also a member of the intelligence panel. "I understand the paranoia about full and complete disclosure to Congress, because there have been some devastating leaks. Past experience made Casey and some of his people gun-shy. Their conduct was understandable, but not justifiable."

Mr. Webster, who has been a Federal judge and Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, will not be a member of the Cabinet, as Mr. Casey was. The White House spokesman,

Marlin Fitzwater, said that the Cabinet rank had been given to Mr. Casey because of his "special relationship" with the President and that the situation was now returning to normal. Mr. Casey was Mr. Reagan's Presidential campaign director in 1980.

Partly because the President had such a close relationship with Mr. Casey, many legislators have said they doubt Mr. Reagan's assertions that he did not know about the diversion of arms profits to the Nicaraguan rebels.

Agency's 'Vital Role'

In his speech today, Mr. Reagan the intelligence agency had been weakened and demoralized in the 1970's when some of its clandestine operations were publicly disclosed. Today, he said, the agency plays a "vital role" in combating drug traffickers, international terrorists and Soviet subversion.

Legislators from both parties say Mr. Reagan and Mr. Casey must bear some responsibility for the agency's problems. "People in the agency have not been thoroughly candid with the Congress," Mr. McHugh said. "I think Mr. Webster has to reconstruct the kind of candor that should exist between Congress and the agency."

The House intelligence committee is holding hearings on a bill that would require the President to tell Congress within 48 hours of the start of any secret intelligence operation. The current law is ambiguous, Mr. McHugh said, and if the Administration "chooses to disregard the spirit of the law, it can do so."

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President Reagan congratulating William H. Webster after the former F.B.I. Director was sworn in as the new Director of Central Intelligence. At right was Vice President Bush.

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